



Editorial

Several of the art works discussed in this *Rijksmuseum Bulletin* were used as vehicles through which awareness of otherness is communicated or in the interpretation of which the view of the other is articulated. For their article on the representation of Black women in the Rijksmuseum collection, Stephanie Archangel and Maria Holtrop mined the museum's database using the search term 'woman' in combination with 'African' or 'black'. The success of such a quest depends on the words used in the descriptions of the works in the collection. Black individuals depicted in these images are not always mentioned. For instance, descriptions of portraits give the name of the sitters, but very seldom that of the Black servants who are also pictured. Although people of colour are present, their presence often goes unnoticed. Five years ago, the museum started to add the subject 'people of African descent' to descriptions in order to facilitate research like this. Archangel and Holtrop focus on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and present a variety of pictures of the Black woman as an allegory, Bible figure or character head, as well as a few portrayals made from life. These last depictions clearly reveal how much the other renditions served to support a world view in which Europe and Europeans were thought to be superior to other continents and other peoples.

Joanna Olchawa discusses a bronze aquamanile, a vessel used for handwashing, in the shape of a horse; it is displayed in the Rijksmuseum's medieval art galleries among various other examples. It is described by art historians of previous generations as coming from the Meuse region or Lotharingia, one of the European production centres of bronze objects. This aquamanile differs from the others in the display in its small size and stylized form, its iconography, the position of the spout and the casting method used. Based on stylistic analysis, Olchawa argues that this aquamanile can be dated to between the tenth and twelfth century and was cast in al-Andalus or a region under Fatimid rule. This makes it one of the only twenty-two surviving 'Islamic' aquamanilia in the world. Animals were a major theme in 'Islamic' art and notably in metalwork. Such objects were used at Muslim gatherings and private events, most likely for handwashing at the outset. After the aquamanile was adopted in Europe in the twelfth century, it was made for and used mostly in Christian liturgy until well into the nineteenth century, which has shaped our view of aquamanilia as European objects. However, as this horse aquamanile confirms, their widespread use was the result of constant encounters between different cultures.

This Bulletin also presents two short notices and a series of fine art acquisitions. Among the acquisitions this time is a work by Marlene Dumas called *The Mediator*, part of her exhibition *Man Kind* (2006), that seems to show the face of Christ. The artist had looked for pictures of kind-looking men and boys of North-African and Levantine descent and portrayed them as anonymous characters. However, the catalogue presents newspaper cuttings referring to the war on terrorism. It is Dumas's way of questioning how the public is influenced by limited information and how general opinion is defined by prejudice and fear of 'the other'.